STIC EIC 3600 Search Request Form

| Today's Date: 9/22/05 | Class/Subclass 705/38 | What date would you like to use to limit the search |
| | | Priority Date: 2/5/01   Other: |

Name Charles Kyle

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Format for Search Results (Circle One):
(PAPER)   DISK   EMAIL

Where have you searched so far?
USP DWPI EPO JPO ACM IBM TDB

IEEE INSPEC SPI   Other _____

Is this a "Fast & Focused" Search Request? (Circle One)   YES   (NO)
A "Fast & Focused" Search is completed in 2-3 hours (maximum). The search must be on a very specific topic and meet certain criteria. The criteria are posted in EIC3600 and on the EIC3600 NPL Web Page at http://ptoweb/patents/stic/stic-tc3600.htm.   *Reference question*

What is the topic, novelty, motivation, utility, or other specific details defining the desired focus of this search? Please include the concepts, synonyms, keywords, acronyms, definitions, strategies, and anything else that helps to describe the topic. Please attach a copy of the abstract, background, brief summary, pertinent claims and any citations of relevant art you have found.

I need information on a software product - Master Builder - produced by a company called Omware. The product was purchased by Intuit in 2001. I would like to have information on the products' features regarding loan "draws" and how such draw/payments are handled by the software. See note on following page. Also, useful would be info on Builder We Software. See attached. Thanks

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STIC Searcher _____   Phone _____

Date picked up _____   Date Completed _____

INTERNET ARCHIVE
WayBackMachine

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|          | http://            |  All  ▾  |  Take me Back  |
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Searched for http://omware.com   **63** Results

Note some duplicates are not shown. See all.
* denotes when site was updated.

Search Results for Jan 01, 1996 - Sep 22, 2005

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	200
0 pages	0 pages	0 pages	4 pages	10 pages	7 pages	8 pages	24 pages	7 pa
			Jan 25, 1999 *	Mar 04, 2000 *	Feb 01, 2001 *	May 26, 2002 *	Feb 08, 2003 *	Jan 23, 2
			Aug 27, 1999 *	May 10, 2000 *	Feb 21, 2001 *	Jun 03, 2002 *	Feb 16, 2003	Feb 08, 2
			Oct 11, 1999	Aug 18, 2000 *	Apr 02, 2001 *	Jul 18, 2002 *	Feb 17, 2003 *	Feb 10, 2
			Nov 18, 1999	Oct 16, 2000	Apr 02, 2001 *	Sep 23, 2002 *	Mar 23, 2003 *	Apr 07, 2
				Oct 20, 2000	Apr 05, 2001 *	Sep 28, 2002 *	Apr 02, 2003 *	May 19, 2
				Oct 27, 2000 *	May 16, 2001 *	Nov 05, 2002	Apr 04, 2003	Sep 21, 2
				Nov 09, 2000 *	May 16, 2001 *	Nov 25, 2002 *	Apr 23, 2003 *	Sep 25, 2
				Nov 17, 2000		Nov 30, 2002	May 26, 2003	
				Dec 07, 2000 *			Jun 12, 2003	
				Dec 10, 2000 *			Jun 19, 2003 *	
							Jun 22, 2003	
							Jul 27, 2003 *	
							Jul 30, 2003 *	
							Aug 05, 2003	
							Sep 26, 2003 *	
							Oct 01, 2003 *	
							Oct 07, 2003	
							Oct 14, 2003 *	
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OMWARE, INC.

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High Tech

Building Software Shared with Public

Omware has made a direct public stock offering: the company is growing fast, tracking the growth of construction and finding that its software's Y2K compliance is a serious advantage in the market place. "As construction companies grow, they professionalize," says Betsy Timm, public relations manager. "Quickbooks is no longer enough for them." The Master Builder software is designed for project management and integrates all aspects of the job. Omware had 1999 sales of $6 million.

## Omware, Inc. announces the opening of 6 regional offices

In January, Omware hired six regional managers, all of whom had been independent consultants for the company for many years. These new employees are each responsible for the operation of a regional office and the development of sales and Associates for their territory. The regional offices are located in the Northeast, the Great Lakes, the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, Southern California, and Hawaii.

SBT announces live internet classes for their resellers using *MentorPoint*

SBT Accounting Systems, of San Rafael, CA, is pleased to announce the addition of live Internet-based training to their Educational Services offerings. SBT is the leading developer of modifiable database accounting software, with over 60,000 sites serving more than 500,000 business users worldwide. The new live internet classes, conducted with *MentorPoint* software by Omware Inc., serve a network of 3,000 Authorized Resellers worldwide.

The Master Builder reviewed in *CPA Software News*

CPA Software News reviewed *The Master Builder 6* in its April/May edition. The reviewer, Michael Roselius, a CPA, concludes, "*Overall, Master Builder 6 is a most impressive suite of capabilities and deserves a close look by medium to large-size contractors who want to improve their profitability and management control by using an integrated accounting and job costing system.*"
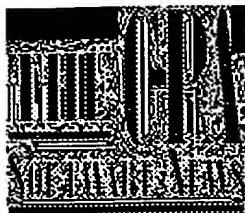
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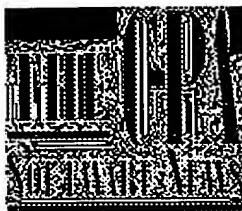
Building the Dream System
By Michael Roselius, CPA

[A-Systems Corporation] [Accu Build] [Bluegrass Technology] [CDCI] [Colonial Systems] [Dexter + Chaney] [e*TEK* international] [Foundation Software] [GEAC] [Industry Specific Software] [Cmware] [Sirius Software] [SoftSys] [Timberline]

Fortunately for the construction industry, there is no shortage of excellent accounting software designed to accommodate its special needs. This software category is also nicely segmented to handle the needs of small to very large companies. Competition is strong in this market because most of the products reviewed have added significant enhancements to their previous versions.

Job cost accounting and payroll define the special accounting challenges that are encountered in the construction contracting business. This is where the bulk of the transactions originate and where they must be allocated to a specific job. The challenge is to make a trade-off between speed and ease of data entry, as well as the level of detail of each transaction. With the proper allocations, management can do meaningful analyses of individual projects.

Another characteristic of the industry is a tendency to create separate legal and accounting entities for each construction project. This complicates set-up and adds complexity to the entire process.

Taking the industry environment into account, and looking at the best features of the entire class of software products, we can design our imaginary 'best of all possible worlds' software package. First, we would have a choice of popular relational database engines, all driven by the same interface. This would allow our small company to start with inexpensive, database software and later scale up to handle more users and transactions. The open nature of the database will allow us to access our data with external report writers and to export the data to spreadsheets and word processors. Next, assuming the proper hardware and operating systems are in place, we could run the data-entry and inquiry screens through a browser interface, thus making the Internet part of our own network. In the General Ledger, we can define our own account structure on a company-by-company basis. When creating the next company, we can copy this chart of accounts directly, making the creation of the new accounting entity a snap.

In the Job Cost module, we can define our own cost codes or import and modify records from industry standard databases. Setting up new jobs can be done by copying the structure from existing jobs, yet you can modify the level of cost item detail desired. We can look at any job, or the entire company, from an accrual-basis or cash-flow perspective, regardless of the accounting method chosen.

Our dream Payroll system can quickly calculate all withholdings and accurately allocate costs for a very busy employee who worked on various phases of various projects in various taxing authorities, all on one time sheet. Then, we can churn out a certified payroll and have our worker's compensation insurance expenses correctly reported, depending on the type of work done. All reporting for prevailing wages, union and minority requirements are included and generated at the click of a mouse, with no further analysis or manual intervention.

Finally, our wonder system has an excellent report writer, with lots of common reports already defined. It allows us to modify these or create new ones from scratch by direct access to our database. These reports can then be viewed on-screen, printed, faxed, e-mailed or published as a web page.

No one product meets our hypothetical specifications, and that's okay. Not every contractor out there needs all these wonderful features. The opportunity for the accountant is to know the client's business and what is important to them, to help them make an intelligent selection, and then to get the system up and running. Only then can the construction accounting software help the client make money in their core business.

A-Systems Corporation

A-Systems Corporation (801-566-3300) submitted a new entry in this year's annual construction management review. JobView was released in July 1999, as a Windows-based successor to its DOS product. JobView is available in three price/function levels. This review covers the Preferred Edition, the company's top-of-the-line version. Their target market is the larger contractor, doing $5 million to $250 million per year in contracts. JobView is a fully integrated accounting system with job costing and payroll functions tuned for the construction industry. There is also a small builder version available for small and start-up companies. It is available for the cost of shipping and handling ($25).

JobView version 1.21 is shipped on a CD, which autoruns and offers program installation, online training, and a 'guided tour' of the accounting and project management functions. The program installation took about 90MB, did not require a reboot when finished and created a menu item for the Start button. In short, it was a well-behaved and polite guest on the system. Upon launching the program, a window appears that offers a selection of companies to use, including the supplied demo company, with a sort order of name or ID. A new company can be created at this point, if required. The next step is to select the user ID, by choosing from the list of existing ones or by inserting a new one. Already, the program displayed its helpful nature and interactive quality. JobView runs as a stand-alone or networked application.

The main screen presents a Windows menu bar and toolbar. The File menu has an option to backup and restore data files, a very desirable but rarely offered feature within an application. JobView has been designed for use by both accounting and management personnel, and the company overview feature presents the current financial condition of the business on-screen in a summarized fashion that should appeal to the business owner. Receivables, payables, cash and job totals are visible in one view so that management can get a big picture feel for how things stand. The accounting overview highlights any discrepancies between receivables and payables detail and their general ledger accounts. It also offers a 'Trouble Scan' button, which highlights where any differences come from. Each suspect transaction is presented with enough detail to allow the accountant to understand and judge if a correction is necessary.

The general ledger setup process allows for one- to three-segment account numbers, with a maximum total of 10 digits. Accounts for retained earnings, current earnings and missing accounts are designated in the same window. New accounts must be assigned a place on the financial statements to ensure balanced results. A user-created password will allow entry of unbalanced GL transactions, should this be necessary. Setting up vendors and customers in payables and receivables is quick and easy, with a multi-tabbed window allowing for lots of data on each entity and also supporting 10 user-defined fields and general purpose notes.

Job costing reporting is customizable by using filters and other selection criteria. The job setup screens provide for plenty of detailed data, some of which can be used in reporting. The system is designed to make on-screen reporting work very well, with drill-down capability going to the original transactions. Of course, any report can also be printed.

JobView is written in Clarion, a 4GL rapid application development language. The reason this might be relevant is that the proprietary database does not have an ODBC

driver available, and therefore the data is only accessible from within the program itself. For those who like to write their own reports, a separate report writer is available. JobView is a terrific first version, enjoying the benefits of being recently written from scratch by developers with industry experience and using state- of-the-art tools. With the usual caveats regarding any early release, JobView could be a good choice for a tool of collaboration between contractor and accountant. The company's web site provides details on support policies and some highlights of each module.

2000: ★★★★

Accu Build

Accu Build (909-923-2244) is now shipping version 6.3 of its construction software, a 32-bit Windows product announced in 1998. Designed for use as a stand-alone or networked installation, it is written in Delphi and uses the Paradox database. It is fully compatible with Windows 9X or NT operating environments but maintains compatibility with other operating or networking systems by using the short file name convention (8+3). It supports multiple companies and offers user-level security. Accu Build is licensed in four levels, with the core package providing General Ledger (GL), Accounts Payable (AP), Accounts Receivable (AR), Payroll, and Job Costing (JC) with full integration and data sharing. Navigation takes place via drop-down menus from the menu bar; there is no toolbar nor are there any on-screen icons. This is, however, a user preference and is no reflection on the underlying usability of the program. The data-entry screens are easy to understand, with drop-down boxes to select accounts, jobs, phases, vendors and other related database records where relevant.

The GL account numbers must be one to five digits, with an option of two decimal places, up to 99,999.99. Changes to this scheme are not supported. The chart of accounts setup screen shows current and prior year balance, as well as a budget amount. When entering a new company, the balances can be keyed in here instead of making a journal entry to bring in existing balances. There is no need to close accounting periods, which means that entries can be made to prior periods. One impressive feature, which is present throughout Accu Build is the "Integrity Test." Selecting this option runs a program to verify the consistency and integration of the data files in that module. This could be important after a power outage or other system failure. A related feature is a menu-driven data file backup-and-restore function.

Payroll is an important business activity requiring more flexibility and power for contractors than for most businesses. An employee may work on multiple projects, job types and even taxing authorities in one pay period. Accu Build accepts very de- tailed data about each employee and for the correct allocation of labor costs to projects. If the contractor needs to provide certified payroll reports, Accu Build is ready.

The Job Costing function provides a detailed database about each project, including cash-basis analysis. Much of the information a manager would want can be found on-screen. Various project billing formats are provided, including AIA (American Institute of Architects), unit, subcontractor and residential.

Crystal Reports is used to generate predefined reports, and the database can be accessed directly for custom reports. Documentation and on-screen help are combined in an HTML format, which is a very useful way for a user with a question to navigate through the help screens. The Help system does not launch a browser or require Internet connectivity to work; the files and reader are installed with the program. The web site offers downloads for program updates, a free demo CD for those that register, and more information on this software package. While Accu Build Construction Software would be a terrific choice for medium to large contractors, remember that this is a fairly early version of a Windows program, so some good tech support both at the user site and from the software vendor will be important.

2000: ★★★★

Bluegrass Technology

Bluegrass for Windows version 8.45 is distributed by Bluegrass Technology Inc. (800-784-9669). This integrated software is designed for HVAC (heating, ventilation & air conditioning), electric, plumbing and other service-type contractors. The focus of the software is on handling a large volume of small, simple projects or work orders, with a unique way of presenting active jobs. The software also provides job costing and project management capabilities addressing larger volume construction requirements. Hardware requirements are moderately high, with minimum quoted workstation or server configurations of a 288MHz Pentium, 64MB of RAM and a 2GB hard drive. Networks supported are Windows 9X or NT, Novel NetWare 4.0 and even LANtastic 7.0. Bluegrass strongly recommends a 100MB Ethernet for acceptable performance. The database used is Microsoft Access and is therefore ODBC compliant, which is important for custom reporting requirements. Modules include typical accounting functions, Estimating, Service Management, Vehicle Maintenance and Job Cost Management.

The user interface features a main screen with a menu bar, which can be hidden, and a toolbar. A typical data-entry screen, such as for customer maintenance, allows lookup of existing records by double clicking the mouse within selected fields, which are highlighted. Keyboard shortcuts for this function are incorporated. The screens are navigated by tabbing between fields and sometimes require the use of the mouse to make selections from drop-down boxes or to bring up lists. Provision is made for multiple companies, and the user can change the companies without logging out.

User IDs with passwords provide security, and the use of profiles controls access to functions. The administrator defines as many user profiles as needed, with each profile given or denied access to specific functions and data-access rights within groups such as operations, accounting and system administration. Each user ID is then associated with one such profile. This provides as simple or complex a scheme as the organization requires.

Bluegrass offers unique dispatch screen displays or boards, which present a grid in a calendar-like format where jobs are assigned to technicians. Complete details of the active and unassigned jobs can be displayed. An automatic refresh option provides a means for the displays to be updated to changes in the database, which is particularly important if multiple managers are working on dispatching. The refresh interval can be set from the main screen, and each board can be customized as to its appearance. With the inherent features of a relational database, all important information is readily available from the dispatch screens, including customer credit and billing history.

The user manuals are provided in hard copy or online format (as web pages), with typical hypertext links that can be viewed through a browser. The online help is not particularly deep, and most of the helpful information can be found in the online manuals.

The company's web site has links to detailed feature lists, provides a download-able demo version and offers PowerPoint presentations. Overall, Bluegrass offers a powerful product purpose-designed for service contractors with a large number of work orders, as well as more extensive new construction jobs. It is designed for real-time dispatching and data entry. This is different from other packages in this review, which target construction companies that run fewer but more complex jobs. For the right company, though, Bluegrass provides a way to take control of and bring order to a fast-paced, high-volume environment.

2000: ★★★★

CDCI

Construction Data Control, Inc. (800-285-3929) offers the construction industry a powerful solution in its Profit Builder Millennium (PBM) version 3. PBM is a Windows package, with a core that consists of General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Job Cost, Contact Manager and System Manager. A rich set of optional modules covers virtually all the special needs of this industry, such as Certified Payroll, Subcontract Control and Equipment. PBM can be run either as a stand-alone or networked program. It requires Windows 9X, 64MB of RAM and a Pentium processor.

PBM uses Microsoft Access as the database, is written in Visual Basic and uses Crystal Reports for report generation. It supports multiple companies, and each company's database can be shared with other companies or kept separate. A wizard is available to assist with setting up a new company and takes care of details such as account number and job cost ID input masks. Multiple users with passwords are standard, and user access can be defined by module. The GUI screens are well designed and allow for screen navigation by keyboard. The SmartFill feature will suggest completion of frequently used fields, such as vendor names, based on the first few characters typed.

The user can make entries into any company without exiting the program, which will be a real time saver for environments where there is constant work with multiple accounting entities. Getting data into or out of this database is supported by an excellent import/export function. Any table in the database, and any field within it, can be selected interactively, the data easily imported or exported, and then be read into documents or spreadsheets for further analysis. Using another innovative and unique feature, the data can be automatically exported nightly to the CDCI web site, stored securely, and then accessed for reporting and analysis from anywhere with web access.

The heart of construction accounting management is in job costing, and PBM has designed an excellent system for keeping close tabs on actual and budgeted numbers, with a focus on profit analysis. The user can see the profit by contract or by the pay item. The financial status of each job can be presented in a cash flow basis, even if the accrual method has been chosen for accounting purposes. When creating a new job, an existing job can be used as a template to copy from, with or without percentage changes. Change order tracking is included within Job Cost. Custom fields can be added to the job description screen, and free form text can be appended to the job description. When running inquiries on actual costs and budgets, the numbers are presented in either a summary or detail level. The Purchase Order function provides the beginning point for actual cost data input into Job Costing. Another important part of Job Costing is the Subcontract Control function, with complete detail level control and inquiry available for draws and retainage.

A very nice manual called the Learning Companion provides step-by-step instructions on getting started and doing basic tasks. A compact yet well-written Reference Guide complements the rich on-screen help system. There are two sample companies provided to use in learning. Also, formal classroom instruction is offered in various major U.S. cities throughout the year.

PBM is sold either directly by CDCI or through a network of certified dealers who provide support for their customers. Direct support from CDCI is provided by a toll-free support line, e-mail, fax and via the Internet. The company web site offers detailed product information, training schedules and program updates. Since there are many optional modules, each company can select just those parts that meet their needs. This is an excellent, well-designed product with an open architecture, ready for the future, adaptable to the needs of most any contractor. It would be a terrific choice for the forward- looking contractor.

2000: ★★★★1/2

Colonial Systems

Colonial Systems, Inc. (800-515-0210) is the publisher of Colonial Construction Management (CCM) Rev. 5.6, continuing 20 years of experience in building software for the construction and property management industry. These two types of businesses are often closely related; for example, the same organization may operate the rental properties of a shopping mall and also do remodeling or space build out for new tenants. CCM is designed to use a SQL database, an important factor in scalability. A fast-growing contractor can start with a small, inexpensive database engine and end up on Informix, Microsoft SQL, Oracle and Sybase SQL Anywhere if necessary, and without changing the basic software. The SQL database engine must be purchased and installed separately, and therefore its cost is not included in the license for CCM. The system runs on a variety of platforms including Novell, UNIX versions and Windows NT. The SQL database design also means that the data can be accessed for import into spreadsheets or custom report writers.

The main screen has a graphical appearance, but the data-entry screens are more text oriented. Function keys are used for searching fields for selections from related master files. In all modules, provision is made for user-defined fields and attachment of free form text files to virtually every record. For example, contact names and addresses can be attached to database tables such as job or subcontractor. More evidence of advanced design thinking is the inclusion of date-oriented ticklers to automatically send e-mails to a designated person. These are examples of features that make software friendly to use and somewhat customizable for many different types of businesses. Also, external documents such as word processing and image files are available inside CCM.

The basic accounting system for construction management includes General Ledger, Accounts Receivable, Job Cost Control, Contract and Sub- contract Control and Accounts Payable. Support for multiple companies includes consolidated reporting and multi-company accounts payable. User-level security with passwords enables organizational control over data especially important in a multi-company environment.

Reporting functions include a sophisticated query-by-example function and drill-down on detail from summarized items. Since CCM uses a SQL database, it is accessible with an ODBC-compliant application that has the required database driver. This means that Crystal Reports or Microsoft Access can read and report data generated by CCM.

Additional modules are available that complement the core functions. These include AIA contract billing, Payroll, Purchase Orders, Customer Service, Work Orders and Inventory Management. Installation and training services are available from Colonial in addition to the license fees. Because a SQL database engine must be installed and attached to CCM, an IT professional consultant will be the fastest and most economical way to install this system. CCM is distributed through business partners who provide installation and continuing support. CCM is a must-see for medium to large construction or property management companies, especially if rapid growth is in the future.

2000: ★★★★1/2

Dexter + Chaney

Dexter + Chaney (800-875-1400) has added some important enhancements with the release of version 9 of its construction management software, Forefront. It is a complete and fully integrated accounting system that includes job cost, purchasing, service, materials and equipment management modules that are specific to the contracting business. New to this version is the document imaging function, which allows for the attachment of document images to transactions, such as AP invoices, at the time of data entry. Anyone who later brings up that transaction on-screen can view the original source document. It isn't hard to imagine the many uses this could have, such as in auditing or retrieval of information not contained in the database fields. An optional extension of the imaging allows for attachment of images to master files and to the storing of any image file into user-defined folders. Images can be imported from all file types, annotated and then transmitted via fax or e-mail. With the relatively low cost and high capacity of disk storage today, this is an excellent idea whose time has come.

With a unique yet attractive graphical interface, this program provides easy navigation to the many data input, inquiry and reporting screens. A main application can be selected from the menu bar or from buttons on the left of the main screen. After selecting a module, the user then chooses an activity button such as Maintenance, Data Entry, Inquiry, Reports, Period End or Utilities. Users can set bookmarks, which allow direct jumping to frequently used screens or reports. Data-entry screens have an unusual mixed graphical and character-text appearance, which is probably an effect of Pro IV, the fourth generation programming language used to build Forefront. Dexter + Chaney is still in the process of adapting its product to the Windows environment, and there are numerous changes from last year's version 8, both in appearance and function. There are more data lookups, drill downs and on-the-fly data-entry capabilities, using either a mouse or the keyboard.

Multiple companies are supported, with each company not required to have all of the modules activated. Forefront also requires users IDs and passwords for application-level security.

Job Cost is tightly integrated with all other modules, so that new transactions are immediately available when running reports. Job pricing methods supported are time and materials, fixed bid, cost plus and unit cost. Job phases are user-defined and can be unique for each job. Similarly, cost types are also user-defined for each job phase.

Forefront is a big, complex product, suitable for medium to large construction companies with the ability and staff to make use of software with this power. This means that both user training and vendor support are important to making successful use of this system. Dexter + Chaney provides a complete set of printed documentation, including an executive overview, installation guide, tutorial, getting started and security manuals. A sample company is included for use with the tutorial manual and for freelance experimentation. Online help is in the Windows standard format and appears very detailed and well-organized, with screen shots and hot links to related topics. The web site has detailed specifications about all the modules and provides support for users who establish a login. Here's the bottom line: For larger construction companies with lots of transactions and some IT expertise on staff, Dexter + Chaney's Forefront could be the perfect choice.

2000: ★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

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eTEK International

eTEK International, inc. (800-888-6894) offers its product (MTX Job Cost Accounting) in several versions, depending on the type of database chosen by the customer. All versions require Microsoft Office 97 or Office 2000 and use either Microsoft Access or SQL Server as the database engine. The program is designed to integrate closely with MS Office products and to be integrated closely with the Internet. The application can be run in a single-user, stand-alone configuration and networked later for multiple users. An important design goal is scalability — as the number of users grows, the database can grow, even changing the underlying engine, if needed, to accommodate a large number of transactions. Minimum system requirements are a Pentium 233MHz with 32MB of RAM, running Windows 9X or later with Microsoft Office installed. Multiple companies can be accommodated, but it is necessary to create the folders and the database outside the program itself to do this. This could be an issue for contractors that regularly create new operating companies for new projects. (The company responded that this is a practice in construction accounting that is no longer required with newer systems with relational database capabilities such as MTX. MTX separates job cost coding structures from GL account numbering structures so that contractors do not have to embed into the coding of their GL accounts, at any level, specific account codes applicable to projects, jobs, cost codes and/or tasks. MTX links the user-defined GL account at the detail line of every single accounting transaction with the specific project, job, cost code or task that is applicable. The company also noted that the MTX GL account structure does allow for any number of divisions, departments and products to be defined and used should a contractor still desire to use their GL account structure to embed new projects into their GL accounts as "new operating companies." Large contractors with numerous separate taxable operating entities can set up separate data databases and use the same common MTX system with a simple point-and-click routine Access reattachment procedure.)

The functions included in the basic system are General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Job Cost, Itemized Billing, Contract Billing, Job Cost Reports, Budgeting and Financial Reporting. An integrated, 50-state Payroll System is available separately, as is an integrated Inventory and Purchase Order module.

The Job Cost module provides for a great deal of detailed data about each new job that is created. Estimated and actual start-and-end dates, percentage complete, burden and overhead percentages, subcontracts, change orders, and more all have a place to live. Cost codes are user defined and are created in a four-step hierarchy of project, job, cost code and task.

The version reviewed here is the single-user, Access-based one. The main menu shows a drop-down box to select the active module, as well as a window with three tabs for data entry, inquiry and reports. Within the tabs are the available functions, which are chosen by double clicking. The Add Journal Entry function presents a new window for entry of batch date, reference numbers, account numbers, descriptions, and debit or credit amounts. Valid account numbers can be looked up with two double clicks, and dollar amounts can be entered into both debit and credit on the same line. It is not apparent how to post the transaction and exit this screen, but closing the window does that. (The company noted that some of its screens do provide an explicit save, close or commit command button. It has, however, chosen to follow Microsoft Office compatibility and Windows standards that provide for screen close by merely clicking on the "x" menu control in the upper, right-hand corner of every screen or by choosing file close form the main menu bar.) The entry can be edited later, if needed. One puzzling discovery is that by minimizing the main menu window, the underlying Access screen is available, with direct view into the table, query, forms and module designs, with the ability to modify these crucial components. The danger of exposing this to the untrained user is obvious. (The company commented that its system is advertised and sold as an open system. They train their users on how to make various modifications as desired in their specific version of MTX, including new queries and reports. The company has found that open systems are much easier to support, and the reaction of its customers is quite favorable on this issue.)

Training on MTX Job Cost Accounting is available from eTEK in several ways, including a CD-based tutorial, classroom training and on-site instruction. The built-in online help has step-by-step procedures for common transactions and related matters. A checklist is included for the startup procedures for each module.

eTEK International, Inc. offers other accounting systems besides job costing; the company's web site offers more details. It is apparent that the overall design philosophy behind the software enables close integration with other popular user programs and with the communication capabilities of the Internet. These types of capabilities combined with the scalability and the open architecture of the database ensure that MTX Job Cost Accounting will be comfortable with and capable in the world of the future. MTX is built around the concept and principles of being a Microsoft Office compatible system and could be a good choice for the right contractor.

2000: ★ ★ ★ ★

Foundation Software

Foundation Software, Inc. (800-246-0800) is the developer and vendor of the Foundation Accounting System (FAS), which is a fully integrated accounting system designed specifically for the labor-intensive construction industry. As the company is proud to point out, FAS is its only product and contractors its only clients. Its target market is mid- to large-sized organizations with 25 or more employees. FAS is written in Microfocus, uses its own data-file structure and runs as a DOS program in either stand-alone or networked environments. Installation and operation in my review environment of Windows 98 was simple and uneventful, although I needed to change the config.sys file.

Character interfaces look more and more dated as time goes by, but remember, this is an accounting system designed for ease and speed of data entry. Many of the features offered in a graphical interface program have some analogy in FAS. As one example, data-entry screens can access existing master files (lookups) using the F8 key. Other lookup functions provide retrieval and selection from the list of options for a field, such as job status. The accomplished keyboarder can usually outperform someone using a keyboard and a mouse. The modules and functions are accessed by menu trees, which are navigated by the arrow keys or by selecting a menu number.

The basic FAS license includes five modules: General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Job Costing and Payroll. Optional applications include Inventory, Fixed Assets, Equipment Maintenance/Tracking, Service Billing/Order Processing, Job Cost Report Writer, Time & Material Billing and Mechanics' Lien. Up to 9,999 companies can be maintained, with user IDs and optional passwords to provide security.

FAS has put a lot of emphasis on its payroll application, providing for about every commonly encountered labor situation. Support is provided for certified payroll, multiple job and taxing jurisdictions within one paycheck, multiple union parameters and reports, and a host of other compliance and reporting situations. User update of the withholding tables is provided for rapid response to changes. All of this functionality depends, of course, on accurate and complete setup of the employee master records, including union names and trade codes properly related.

The Job Costing application supports budgets, user-defined cost codes, overhead allocation and productivity analysis, to name just a few of the advanced features offered by FAS. The cost codes specify completion levels or phases of a job and provide greater detail on actual and budgeted costs. Since this is an integrated set of modules, the job costing module receives transaction data directly from Payroll and all other applications.

A demo company set of data is provided and is used with the User Guide to give an orientation for using the system and navigating the screens. These lessons walk the new user through most tasks, such as entering master records or transactions. FAS also offers on-site and online classroom training. The rich database created is an easy target for the 500 included reports, and examples of some are shown in their Sample Report Book. For those who want to write their own reports, the optional report writer will be a handy tool but will require some training and a knowledgeable user.

So what's not to like? This is a tough, powerful tool, built to do one thing well. To the owner of a typical construction company who has been fighting a manual system or a general-purpose accounting package, FAS will feel like an experienced partner. The computer geeks, like me, will wish it had a graphical interface and a relational database that could be read with an ODBC driver. But then again, I'm not sitting on-site in a trailer trying to get payroll checks out on Friday, dealing with a matrix of jobs, unions and taxing authorities. It does seem that the Internet is or will be touching every business in ways that are unanticipated. Who knows how universal connectivity will affect the construction business? But experience has shown that integration with closed, proprietary systems is a slow and expensive process. According to the company, the new version of FAS will address this. But for today, Foundation is a powerful system for construction accounting that can run on old as well as new equipment and get the job done. Visit the company's web site for a closer look.

2000: ★★★ 1/2

GEAC

GEAC AEC Business Solutions (800-851-1115) released Version 2.0 of its StarBuilder Construction Management System for Windows in November 1999. StarBuilder was developed using current Microsoft tools and requires Windows 9X or NT Work- stations. The high-end configuration uses a client-server environment, with Microsoft SQL Server as the database engine. User-level security can be defined down to the specific job, and provision is made for up to 98 accounting companies. StarBuilder is offered in any combination of modules, but all installed programs are fully integrated. A typical full system would provide an integrated accounting and job costing system with payroll, equipment costing, inventory, time & materials billing, and estimating. A Universal Estimating Interface imports data from spreadsheets or many other stand-alone estimating programs. The user interface is easy to navigate and looks familiar to experienced Windows users.

As strong as the accounting is in StarBuilder, it is strengthened even more by the addition of web-enabled modules for project management, estimating and executive information. Time and attendance entry on Palm Pilots is even provided for more accurate data entry from the field.

Showing an understanding of the practical issues of the construction business, Star-Builder includes some features that take the program beyond accounting and provide some decision support for management. Cash flow is always a hot topic, and with multiple jobs going concurrently, managers often need to know how each project is affecting cash. The Job Cost Inquiry has a status screen which presents a summary of each job in three ways: cost status (accrual-basis accounting), cash status (receipts vs. payments) and contract status (original amount, change orders, percent billed and amount billed). Surely every accountant has faced a puzzled client who wants to know why cash is tight when the business is "making money." This presentation of facts can help explain the situation and therefore lead to a decision on what actions need to be taken. The contractor can also plan cash flow by scheduling vendor payments by job (which ties their payments to receipts from the client) or by scheduling payment to take advantage of discounts. Beyond this guideline, specific invoices or vendors can be handled as exceptions. Vendors' insurance information can be entered and scheduled payments flagged for expired certificates.

The StarBuilder Payroll module can handle multiple states, rates, jobs and unions, prevailing wage, and certified payroll requirements. There is full provision for worker's compensation and other labor burdens to be applied down to the job level.

When creating new jobs, cost detail can be assigned for up to three summarization levels in five different cost categories. User-defined fields provide some level of additional customization where needed, but the rich detail already provided should be sufficient for most installations.

StarBuilder uses the industry standard Crystal Reports Writer for output forms and reports. This tool can be a powerful tool in the hands of a trained user who can read the underlying relational database tables to create any logical view of the business that is requested by management.

The overall capabilities of the system, the scalability of the database and the modularity of the offering indicate a software solution that would be an excellent choice for the construction company that is growing fast or one that is already big and needing to upgrade from software with less power. The web site provides some general information on features of StarBuilder and has links to the wide array of other GEAC accounting software products.

2000: ★★★★ 1/2

Industry Specific Software

Industry Specific Software, inc. (ISS; 800-877-2496) has been providing software for the construction business since 1985. Its construction accounting product is Construction Manager Version 5.3, a GUI program written in Visual basic to run under Windows 95, 98 or NT. It is a complete, integrated package that features accounting and job cost accounting, designed for multiple companies. Base modules include GL, AR, AP, Job Management, Subcontractor Management and Estimating. Optional modules are available for Payroll, Purchasing, Scheduling and Warranty Management. Construction Manager can be run as a multi-user networked system, able to handle an unlimited number of projects for up to 999 accounting companies. The user IDs are not company specific, so a company is chosen from the drop-down list each time an entry is made. This would be appropriate for a situation where numerous companies are being used concurrently, and it would be time consuming to log out and change companies frequently.

Installation and initial company setup is made very easy by using the optional Quick Start Wizard. This easy setup assumes that some basic accounting and bookkeeping decisions have been made, such as assigning of accounts to withholding, sales taxes, etc. A choice of accounting methods is offered, (either the cash or accrual basis) and three model charts of accounts are available based on either the NAHB (National Association of Home Builders), CSI (Construction Specifications Institute) models or one designed for remodelers. The wizard gives plenty of explanatory text during each choice and allows the point-and-click method of selecting accounts and setting up other parameters. Within about 10 minutes, I had a new company set up with appropriate associations between GL accounts.

The user interface is easy to navigate and understand, using either the standard Windows-style drop-down menus or icons from the toolbar. The detail transaction entry screens can be used by keyboard only if desired (the usual preference of power data-entry people). Setting up customer or vendor master files requires a numeric key but allows an editable sort key, which will make finding the name later much easier. GL accounts, terms, codes and other items can be chosen from the drop-down list where appropriate. When entering an AP invoice, the amount can be distributed over several jobs using multiple lines for distribution, with the remaining amount to be distributed shown.

For reporting, a new window is opened, with tabs representing every module. On each tab are the lists of the defined reports available. After selecting a report, the parameter screen appears, which prompts for company, division, period and other filters to restrict the data set. The report can then be sent to a specified destination, including e-mail addresses, Lotus Notes or Microsoft Exchange folders, printers or the screen.

ISS provides an exceptional "How It Works" manual — a model of readability and usefulness. A free trial period is available to allow the prospective user a chance to get familiar with the screens and reports. Software updates can be run automatically over an Internet connection, which is an example of the forward-looking nature of the product. The on-screen help system is a reflection of the printed manual and is easy to use. ISS Construction Manager is a very powerful package, using state-of-the-art

technology. It should be on the must-see list for any construction industry company.

2000: ★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

Omware

Omware (800-726-6278) has been providing software designed solely for the construction management industry for over 18 years. Its only product is The Master Builder 6 version 99A1 (MB6) for Windows, a fully integrated accounting system that includes the special functions needed in construction management and accounting. Core applications include job costing, accounts receivable, accounts payable, general ledger, job budgets and proposals. Thirteen optional modules are available for special requirements, which will cover a variety of needs. Some examples of the optional modules are Inventory, Equipment, Service Receivables and Scheduling. By taking advantage of the graphical powers of the Windows environment, the user can eliminate preprinted forms and laser print all forms and reports on plain paper. MB6 can run in stand-alone, multi-user and client server con- figurations for all Windows versions. The database is open architecture, making it easily available to Office applications and custom report writers. The graphical interface does not resemble a standard Windows look and will take some getting used to, but this is not an obstacle in using the program. After selecting the company to use and entering the user ID and password, cascading menus navigate the user to the data-entry screen or reports.

The beginning of any project is the bidding process, which requires estimates to be generated. This could be a time-consuming exercise, but MB6 includes a powerful module to address this need. Power Takeoff is a spreadsheet-style interface for the entry of budget and other cost estimates, which is fully integrated into the scheduling, project management and accounting functions. The estimating function can also generate purchase orders and subcontracts, and provision is made for importing data for item costs.

A CPM (critical path) scheduling function is built into the product and can generate Gantt charts and other reports for project management. The database is integrated with the rest of MB6. This is an excellent example of how a software package targeted at a specific industry can include functions beyond accounting and provide tools that can actually help in the management of the business.

The Subcontract Control module provides control over all subcontract data, including insurance coverage, retentions and payments. Change Order Control helps in managing subcontractors and job costs.

Consultants with expertise in The Master Builder provide installation and initial training. Omware presents seminars throughout the United States in major cities, covering accounting, estimating, program operations and management for profit. The Internet Direct Academy offers training via the Internet and phone conferencing, presenting 90 classes on The Master Builder.

MB6 is a very capable construction management package and warrants evaluation by contractors in the range of $1 million to $50 million in revenues. Three levels of licensing fees are offered to provide the appropriate cost and power requirements of various contractor sizes. This is the fifth year of the company's Windows product, and with a sole focus on the construction industry, the prospective user can expect stability in the product and an understanding of the client industry. The open nature of the design is an important comfort for thinking about future connectivity and integration issues. Omware provides 90 days of free technical support, then offers annual support contracts. Support is provided by phone, fax or e-mail, with promised response the same day. The Omware web site provides a brief overview of the company and its product. Seriously interested contractors might consider Omware's 90-day money back guarantee as a way to evaluate the power of this package.

2000: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Sirius Software

Sirius Software, Inc. (800-788-4849) is now shipping Sirius GT Accounting for Windows version 6.3, a fully integrated suite of accounting software. Designed for multi-user and multi-company use, it is a graphical interface product that runs in all Windows environments. While it is targeted to be a general purpose accounting system, it can easily function as a construction management application by implementing modules for Estimating, Job Costing, Equipment Control and Item Billing. This is a modular system. Some parts are able to run as stand-alone programs and export data to another application. The user organization can choose which modules to purchase and install while maintaining the integration of data.

Navigation is via mouse or keyboard. The main screen presents three methods to access functions: drop-down menus from the menu bar, a toolbar and on-screen icons. Accessing a module such as payroll opens a new window, and button bars offer the functions available (such as master file maintenance, transactions input and reporting). In addition, each module offers access to many utility programs, such as on-screen calculators, notepad, phone list, reminders and appointment lists. For many users, this might eliminate the need to exit or switch between programs, which is often confusing for the inexperienced user. For a manager who is not interested in details or printed reports, the Management Overview screen presents a summary of receivables, payables, cash and jobs.

Sirius GT is shipped on CD, and installation was quick and easy. A set of demo company data is included, which is always a boon for training new users or for evaluating the system before purchase. The on-screen help is context sensitive but does not offer an index or a means to access other topics; it does not look like the standard Windows help systems. The detailed printed manual is well organized. For those wanting better access to their data, an ODBC driver is available at extra cost for making the program data available to custom report writers and other programs.

The estimating function is a key module in adapting Sirius for the construction business. Multiple estimators can be defined and their data kept separate. A user-maintained database is available for accessing item costs and dropping the values into estimates. There are various pricing services available for the construction industry, and Sirius estimating can access these. Provision is made for job phases, cost categories and cost codes, with an unlimited number of jobs and item database records. If the contractor wins a bid, the estimating data can then be transferred directly into either the Job Cost or Item Billing function. The job cost detail can be reported by phase, cost category or entire project, with support provided for change order tracking. Detailed labor and overhead amounts can be accessed by on-screen inquiries, with drill-down from summary amounts to transaction details.

The targeted market in the construction industry is the medium-sized specialty contractor and service and rental companies. By selecting the appropriate modules, the contractor can have a powerful, easy-to-learn, integrated accounting system that supports the unique needs of the construction company. Sirius distributes its software through a network of authorized resellers who also provide installation and training. There is a wealth of other features and functions not covered here, so visit the Sirius web site for more product information and to request a demo package.

2000: ★ ★ ★ ★

SoftSys

SoftSys. Inc. (877-763-8797) is based in Ontario and markets SoftSys Project Enterprise (SPE) Suite version 4.5 to project-oriented businesses. Used as a stand-alone product, it can provide a great deal of powerful features to construction or engineering businesses. It is designed to integrate with ACCPAC for Windows to make a complete accounting system. Unique among the other products reviewed, it is essentially a front end, is very customized for a project-oriented business, and provides data entry and reporting for job or project cost accounting and invoicing. The General Ledger, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable and Payroll functions are done by ACCPAC (with direct integration of data) or can be exported or re-keyed into another GL package. The modules included in SPE are Projects, Purchasing, Inventory,

Reporting, Time & Billing and System Manager.

The graphical interface of SPE is attractive and intuitive, if not perfectly in accordance with Windows standards. From the initial screen, the various modules can be accessed either through a set of cascading windows, which drill down to the specific functions, or by an expandable, Windows Explorer-style tree. When accessing the records in the master files, two buttons appear next to the key field, "F" for Find and "N" for New record. Clicking the Find button opens a window, which offers the choice of seeing all records in order or interactively building a query to find an existing record. The system is written in Visual C++ and uses CodeBase as the database engine. The database, which is xBase file-compatible, is accessible by report writers such as Crystal Reports, making for easy creation of custom reports or the exporting of data.

A new installation would start by setting up one or more company profiles, along with user IDs and passwords. Because of the flexibility of the program and the number of user-defined parameters, there is plenty of work to do. There are lots of data fields and parameters available when setting up a new customer, including the ability to point to specific revenue, receivable and WIP accounts.

For reporting and the generation of forms such as invoices, the standard forms designer module uses a graphical presentation of the layout, which can be changed on-screen. This module will take some time to use proficiently, but there are plenty of templates ready for use with little or no modification.

This review can only touch on some of the vast array of features offered by Project Enterprise Suite. For a deeper look, see the company's web site, which is very rich in content. From there, you can request a 30-day free demo CD, arrange for an online demo and look at product specifications. Or, look in on the interactive support bulletin board where questions and comments from users are posted, with responses from SoftSys support and other users. This web site could be used as a model for other software vendors; it takes some courage and belief in your product to make random user comments available for public viewing. SoftSys claims a user base of about 400, mostly engineering and construction firms. Setting aside the fact that SPE was not designed to be a complete accounting system, it has succeeded in producing a package that does a terrific job of helping a project-oriented company get a handle on project costs and revenues.

2000: ★★★ 1/2

Timberline

The Timberline Software Corporation (800-628-6583) released Version 6 of the Gold Collection for Construction Accounting Extended in 1999. It is a Windows-based, 32-bit application with an attractive graphical interface. Although it can be installed as individual modules, it can provide a complete accounting and integrated job costing system. The main menu shows icons representing all of the application modules installed. Selecting a module opens a new window for that application. The Gold Collection uses Pervasive as the database and can be run both as a stand-alone or as a multi-user, networked system under Windows 9X or NT 4.0 or later.

The user-defined GL account number format supports multiple departments and locations within one company. Timberline can use either cash or accrual accounting. The GL account maintenance screen shows six tabs, with general account information and debit/credit balance and transaction summaries for current-year periods. A general-purpose text notes field is available for each account, and user-defined fields are also available.

In the Job Cost module, the job setup screen presents a series of tabbed windows with detailed job data and a huge number of dollar amounts, percentages, formulas and text fields. This covers about every financial aspect of a project. Buttons along the bottom let the user list the available jobs with one click or build a simple query to find a job using any of the vast number of data fields available. Cost code setup is presented using a similar interface, with tabs for estimates, contract info, receivables, user-defined fields and much more. A unique feature is user-defined job checklists, which are linked to each job setup screen.

The Report Designer is one of the best reviewed, with full graphical design and preview capabilities. A large number of reports are already provided and can be used as the basis for custom designs with different sorting and subtotaling methods.

A very nice set of system utilities will assist the trained system manager in keeping the system running. These include file system verification, file management (such a backup and restore) and user setup. Users can be assigned to groups, and the groups can be given file permissions. This will be greatly appreciated in a large user organization.

With a product of this power and complexity, training and support will be important to the new user. The on-screen help is standard Windows style but not too deep in detail. The help system did, however, provide a glossary of terms about the construction business that would be very useful to an inexperienced user. The Getting Started Manual goes through each module with step-by-step instructions for system implementation, module setup, data entry and report generation. If access to the Internet is available, the Timberline web site offers support directly linked from the on-screen help, with a knowledge database and a user forum accessible at any time. For user training, there are seven specific courses offered at many U.S. locations and dates. Two sample databases are included to use for on-site training or as templates from which to copy. Timberline's web site has some detailed product, training support information as well as other company links.

Timberline has created an excellent product, with the flexibility and built-in customization that allows the program to adapt to a wide range of company sizes. It is an outstanding product that should be evaluated in depth by any contractor looking for new software.

2000: ★★★★